



# SONGS FOR FREE MEN AND WOMEN

*A Companion to the Book*  
*What So Proudly We Hail*

Amy A. Kass | Leon R. Kass

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# The Star-Spangled Banner

WORDS BY FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

*Francis Scott Key (1779–1843), Washington lawyer and amateur poet, was inspired to pen the verses of “The Star-Spangled Banner” by the unlikely success of American troops resisting the British attack on Baltimore’s Fort McHenry on September 13, 1814, two days after the burning of the capital. Nearly all American school-children are taught the words of Key’s first stanza, now our national anthem, and for the rest of their lives they hear it sung on patriotic holidays and at sporting events. Rarely, however, do we attend to the words. Many whose hearts are stirred by hearing the anthem sung probably could not tell you what it literally means or what Key intended to convey.*

*What is the meaning of the poem’s opening question: “O! say can you see by the dawn’s early light / What so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming”? How does it differ from the question that concludes the first stanza: “O! say does that star-spangled banner yet wave / O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?” Why, according to the song, is the waving banner important? Why sing a song about a flag? The last stanza turns from the present war to the future. For what does it call? What relation does the song suggest between the flag and the motto “In God is our trust”? How does singing the song make you feel? Does thinking about the anthem’s words alter those feelings?*

O! say can you see by the dawn’s early light  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming;  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thro’ the perilous fight,  
O’er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rockets’ red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.  
O! say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
Where the foe’s haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
What is that which the breeze, o’er the towering steep,  
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning’s first beam,  
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream:  
’Tis the star-spangled banner! O! long may it wave  
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore  
That the havoc of war and the battle’s confusion  
A home and a country should leave us no more!  
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps’ pollution.  
No refuge could save the hireling and slave  
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:

And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

O! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand  
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!  
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

# My Country 'Tis of Thee

WORDS BY SAMUEL F. SMITH

*Until it was officially replaced by “The Star Spangled-Banner” in 1931, “My Country, 'Tis of Thee” served as our de facto national anthem. It was written in 1831 by Samuel Francis Smith (1808–95), Baptist minister, journalist, and author. Though it is set to the music of Britain’s national anthem, Smith came to it by way of a German song. Also known as “America,” this song was first performed in public on July 4, 1831, at a children’s Independence Day celebration at Park Street Church in Boston.*

*What is it about “My Country” that the song primarily celebrates? Several verses explicitly refer to the Divine: for what reasons and for what purposes? Several verses speak about education and school: what role do they play in the nation’s story? What, according to the song, do we owe to our ancestors? To what—ancestors, or schools, or God, or something else—are we indebted for “Sweet Freedom”? How does singing this song make you feel?*

My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet Land of Liberty  
Of thee I sing;  
Land where my fathers died,  
Land of the pilgrims’ pride,  
From every mountain side  
Let Freedom ring!

My native country, thee,  
Land of the noble free,  
Thy name I love;  
I love thy rocks and rills,  
Thy woods and templed hills;  
My heart with rapture thrills,  
Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze,  
And ring from all the trees  
Sweet Freedom’s song;  
Let mortal tongues awake;  
Let all that breathe partake;  
Let rocks their silence break,  
The sound prolong.

Our fathers’ God, to Thee,  
Author of Liberty,  
To Thee we sing.  
Long may our land be bright  
With Freedom’s holy light;  
Protect us by Thy might  
Great God, our King.

# America the Beautiful

WORDS BY KATHARINE LEE BATES

*This popular and eminently singable song was written by Katharine Lee Bates (1859–1929), an English professor at Wellesley College. The poem, originally called “Pikes Peak,” was inspired by the sights Bates had seen on a train ride to and from Colorado Springs, especially by the vista she beheld from the top of Pikes Peak. As she explained, “Near the top we had to leave the wagon and go the rest of the way on mules. I was very tired. But when I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse.” Bates’s poem, published on July 4, 1895, was eventually combined with music written by church organist and choirmaster Samuel A. Ward (1847–1903), becoming popular around 1910. Like the other patriotic songs, “America the Beautiful” is mostly known by its first stanza, which begins by celebrating America’s natural gifts and ends with a plea (or is it a prayer?) for brotherhood. What do the other stanzas celebrate, and what do they call for? How would you summarize the teaching and ideals of this poem? How does singing this song make you feel?*

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet  
Whose stern impassion’d stress  
A thoroughfare of freedom beat  
Across the wilderness.  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for heroes prov’d  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved  
And mercy more than life.  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine  
Till all success be nobleness  
And ev’ry gain divine.

O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears.  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea.

# Battle Hymn of the Republic

WORDS BY JULIA WARD HOWE

*“The Battle Hymn of the Republic” was written in 1861 as an abolitionist song by Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910), a prominent American abolitionist and social activist. While witnessing a review of Union troops in Washington, D.C., Howe heard the Union army marching song “John Brown’s Body” set to a tune written by William Steffe (1830–90). The stirring tune inspired her to write new lyrics: this poem came to her in the middle of the night and she scrawled the verses in the dark, using an old stump of a pen. It became a popular Union song during the rest of the Civil War and after.*

*The song is called a hymn: is there a difference between a hymn and an anthem? What is a battle hymn? The song seems to offer an interpretation of the Civil War: what is its teaching? Other songs collected here also make reference to God and speak of His relation to our national affairs: how does this one differ from the others? The second-to-last line of stanza five originally read, “As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free”: what do you make of the substitution of “live” for “die”? How can what was a partisan Union song become a song of the entire nation? How does singing this song make you feel?*

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:  
His truth is marching on.

*(Chorus)*

Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:  
His day is marching on.

*(Chorus)*

Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:  
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,  
Since God is marching on."

*(Chorus)*

Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Since God is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:  
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!  
Our God is marching on.

*(Chorus)*

Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As he died to make men holy, let us die<sup>1</sup> to make men free,  
While God is marching on.

*(Chorus)*

Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
While God is marching on.

He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,  
He is wisdom to the mighty, He is succour<sup>2</sup> to the brave;  
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of Time<sup>3</sup> His slave,  
Our God is marching on.

*(Chorus)*

Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory Hallelujah!  
Our God is marching on.

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<sup>1</sup> In today's version, "live" is usually substituted for the original "die."

<sup>2</sup> In today's version, "honor" is usually substituted for the original "succour."

<sup>3</sup> In today's version, "wrong" is usually substituted for the original "Time."

# God Bless America

IRVING BERLIN

*Composer and lyricist Irving Berlin, born Israel Baline (1888–1989), immigrated with his family to the United States in 1893 to escape the pogroms against the Jews in his native Russia. In 1918, while serving in the Army, Berlin wrote “God Bless America,” taking its title from the phrase his mother often used to indicate that “without America, her family would have had no place to go.” In 1938, around the twentieth anniversary of the end of World War I, the popular singer Kate Smith asked Berlin for a song. Concerned about the war clouds gathering in Europe, he tried writing a few songs about the United States, but then remembered this one, which had sat in a drawer for twenty years. Berlin revised the song and Smith introduced it on her Armistice Day 1938 radio broadcast.<sup>§</sup> On September 11, 2001, following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, this was the song that members of the House of Representatives solemnly sang on the steps of the Capitol.*

*The introduction speaks of allegiance, gratitude, and prayer: what exactly is their connection, one to another? The song is said to be a prayer: for what exactly do we pray? Is this a song only for times of crisis? How does singing this song make you feel?*

*(Spoken Introduction)*

While the storm clouds gather  
Far across the sea,  
Let us swear allegiance  
To a land that’s free;  
Let us all be grateful  
For a land so fair,  
As we raise our voices  
In a solemn prayer.

*(Song)*

God bless America,  
Land that I love,  
Stand beside her and guide her  
Through the night with a light from above.  
From the mountains, to the prairies,  
To the oceans white with foam.  
God bless America,  
My home sweet home.  
God bless America,  
My home sweet home.

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<sup>§</sup> Berlin also provided the spoken introduction to the song, which Smith used regularly but which is rarely heard now.

# This Land Is Your Land

WOODY GUTHRIE

*Not everybody took to “God Bless America.” Songwriter, folk singer, and radical political activist Woody Guthrie (1912–67) wrote this popular folk song in 1940 as an answer to Irving Berlin and Kate Smith. Troubled by many scenes of poverty and desolation that he had witnessed on his travels during the Great Depression, Guthrie wrote “This Land Is Your Land” in a populist egalitarian and antiestablishment spirit.\**

*What is celebrated in this song? What does Guthrie mean in his claim “This land was made for you and me”? Is this a patriotic song? Is there anything particularly American about its message? How does singing this song make you feel?*

*(Chorus)*

This land is your land, this land is my land,  
From California to the New York island;  
From the redwood forest, to the Gulf Stream waters,  
This land was made for you and me.

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,  
I saw above me that endless skyway;  
I saw below me that golden valley:  
This land was made for you and me.

*(Repeat Chorus)*

I’ve roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps  
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;  
And all around me a voice was sounding:  
This land was made for you and me.

*(Repeat Chorus)*

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling,  
And the wheatfields waving and the dust clouds rolling,  
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting:  
This land was made for you and me.

*(Repeat Chorus)*

As I went walking, I saw a sign there,  
And on the sign it said “No Trespassing.”  
But on the other side it didn’t say nothing,  
That side was made for you and me.

*(Repeat Chorus)*

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,  
By the relief office I seen my people;  
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking  
Is this land made for you and me?

*(Repeat Chorus)*

Nobody living can ever stop me,  
As I go walking that freedom highway;  
Nobody living can ever make me turn back,  
This land was made for you and me.

## Acknowledgments

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